Handling ZoneAlarm Pop-ups

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ZoneAlarm is a popular firewall program. Firewalls protect your PC against malicious attempts to access your PC from the Internet. Windows XP and Windows Vista include a built in firewall, but other versions of Windows do not – hence the need for an additional program like ZoneAlarm.

ZoneAlarm also provides another level of protection, sometimes called egress protection – it prevents programs on your PC from accessing the Internet without your permission. Why is this useful? Well, viruses and other malicious programs will often attempt to access the Internet to send information about you back to their authors, or to spread themselves. Even legitimate programs sometimes take advantage of an Internet connection to send information about you back to their authors without your knowledge – something which many people regard as unacceptable and a breach of privacy.

Whilst the basic firewall functions of ZoneAlarm are largely automatic, the egress protection needs to be manually "trained" to know which programs are allowed to access the Internet and which are not. This is often a source of confusion, as it generates pop-up dialogue boxes which people are sometimes unsure how to deal with. This document gives some basic guidelines on how to respond to these pop-ups.

Please note – this is *not* a complete user guide for ZoneAlarm. For general information on using ZoneAlarm, please refer to the built in help system, and view the tutorial. To view the Tutorial open ZoneAlarm (double click the red and yellow ZA icon in the bottom right corner of the screen), select "Overview" on the left, then the "Status" tab near the top, then click on "Flash Tutorial" near the top right of the window.

What the pop-up tells you

The illustration below shows a typical ZoneAlarm dialogue box. The colour varies depending on the type of alert (e.g. “New program”, “Changed Program”, or “Repeat Program”, but the basic format is the same and the guidelines that follow apply in all cases.

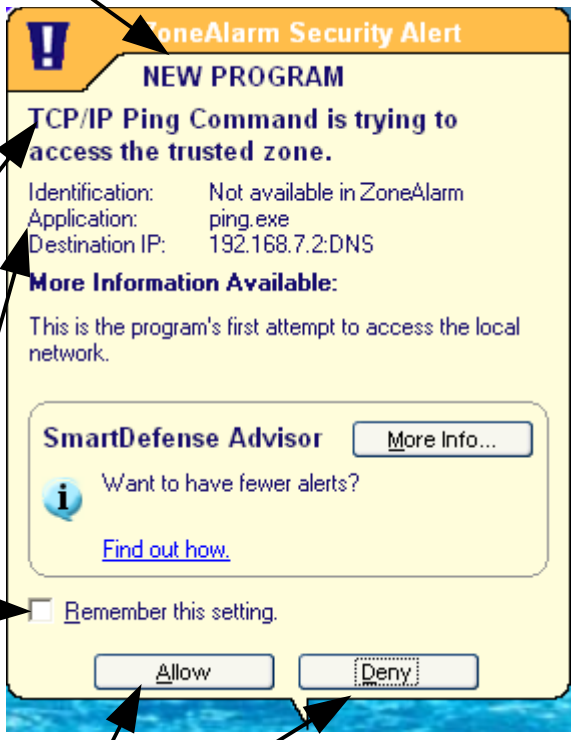
A. This tells you if the program has accessed the Internet before, and if it has been changed since it did.

B. This tells you which program is trying to access the Internet (or your network). It may be a recognisable name (like “Outlook Express”) or a program file name.

C. This area gives more technical information. Most users can ignore this.

D. If this is clicked before choosing “Allow” or “Deny” then you will not be asked again about this program unless it gets changed (e.g. a new version of the program is installed).

E. These buttons tell ZoneAlarm whether to allow access to the Internet or not for this program. The guidelines below will help you to decide which to choose.



Guidelines for dealing with ZoneAlarm pop-ups

These guidelines will help you decide what to do when a ZoneAlarm pop-up appears. If you follow them, then over time you should find that the number of pop-ups you see is reduced significantly. The rules can be summarised as:

> *If in doubt, choose **Deny**. If that causes problems, next time that program asks for access, choose **Allow**. Once you have worked out the answer for a particular program, choose **Remember this setting** before selecting **Allow** or **Deny**.*

Below are some more detailed step by step guidelines which elaborate on the paragraph above:

1. Look at the **name** of the program which is trying to access the Internet (**B** above). If you *know* that the program needs to access the Internet (e.g. Internet Explorer), then click "**Remember this setting**" (**D** above) and then click "**Allow**" (**E**) and that's it - no need to look at the rest of the steps below.

   However, if you don't recognise the name of the program, or don't know if it should access the Internet, don't worry - just go on to step 2.

2. If you haven't seen this program trying to access the Internet before, or simply can't remember, click "**Deny**". Do *not* click the "Remember this setting" box. Do try to remember the name of the program (**B** above) so that you will recognise it if the same pop-up appears again.

3. If your computer continues to work normally and you don't have any problems with the programs you are using, then "Deny" was the correct answer. Next time you see this program asking to access the Internet, click "**Remember this setting**" and then "**Deny**" and you won't be bothered about it again.

   If, however, after clicking "Deny", a program you were trying to use does not work correctly (e.g. you get an error message or the program crashes), this probably means it needs to access the Internet to function properly. (You may need to restart the program, or even reboot the computer after this, unfortunately).

4. If you had problems as described in step 3 after clicking "Deny" for a particular program (remember you need to check the name shown at **(B**) above)**,** then the next time you see this program ask for Internet access click "**Remember this setting**" and click "**Allow**".

These guidelines are by no means exhaustive but should do for the majority of cases. If you need more detailed information, read the ZoneAlarm built in help.

Multiple Requests from the same program

You may find that the same program asks for access twice in a row. If you look carefully then you may see that in (**B**) above it says "**Trusted zone**" the first time and "**Internet**" the second time. For the purposes of this guide you can ignore the distinction – just give the same answer ("Allow" or "Deny") to both. The "Trusted Zone" is your local network – if you have one. For most people the rules for "Trusted Zone" and "Internet" will be the same. If you are one of the people who is running a local network for something more advanced than basic

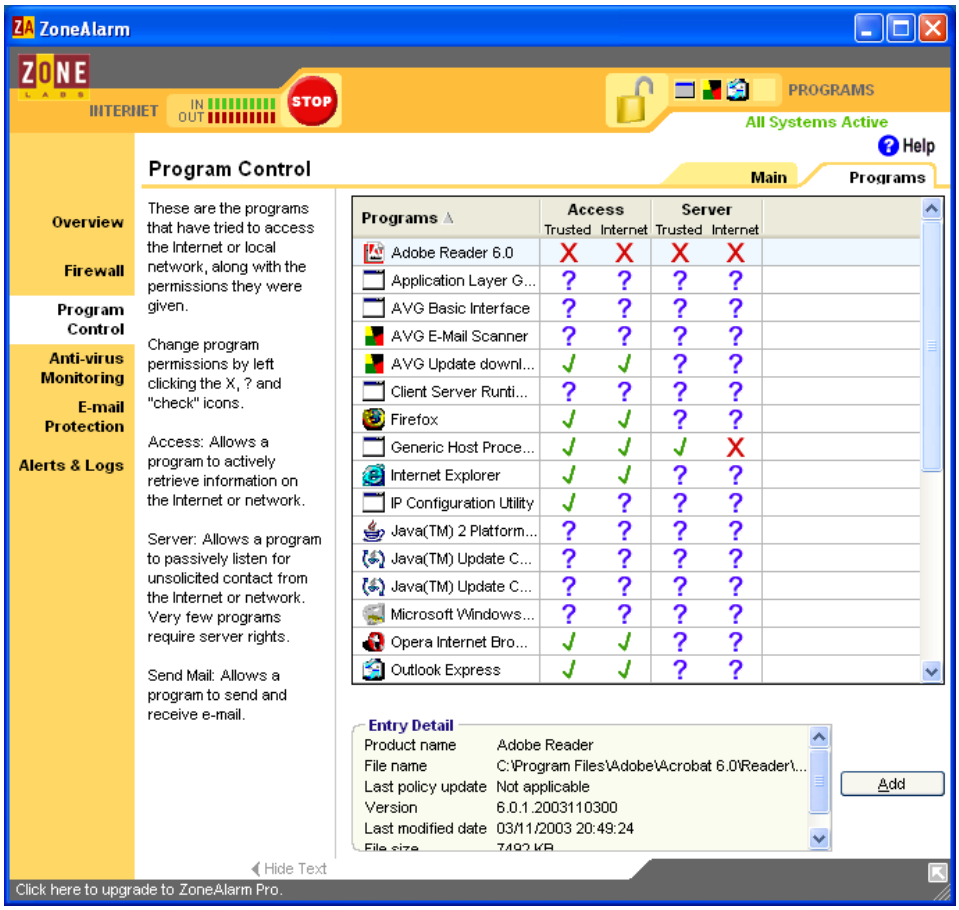
Internet access then this guide does not apply to you and you need to learn how to use ZoneAlarm in more detail.

Troubleshooting - Unblocking programs

If you click “Remember this setting” and then answer “Deny” to a program which needs Internet access, you will have to correct this before you can use the program. To do this:

1. Open ZoneAlarm by double-clicking the red and yellow ZA icon in the bottom right hand corner of the screen.

2. Select “**Program Control**” on the left hand side, then select the “**Programs**” tab at the top. You should have a display something like this:



3. Find the name of the program you are having problems with in the list – it will have one or more red crosses beside it in the “Access” column (ignore the “Server” column).

4. Click on a cross and a small menu will appear with a tick, a cross and a question mark. Select the tick. If there are crosses under both “Trusted” and “Internet” in the “Access” column, change them both to ticks. Then close the program window.

Summary

ZoneAlarm has many more features than can be addressed in this guide. It should, however, be enough to help the majority of users who only require basic Internet access.

Do note that if you have Windows XP then you may be happy with the built in firewall, and can dispense with ZoneAlarm altogether. However, you will lose the egress protection that ZoneAlarm gives you (see the introduction to this document) – it's up to you how much this matters.

There are also other firewall programs available. If you cannot get on with ZoneAlarm, then one of the other programs may suit you better. A search on the Internet should give you some suitable candidates.

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